



## Publishing careers in Biomedicine

Priti Nagda and Caitlin Owen

**Caitlin Owen: It sounds like it's worked out well, looking at where you are now.**

**Priti Nagda:** I would say it's been a long process. I've worked at several different publishing houses. I think it's just taking that leap of faith a little bit sometimes, and also just seeing what pays off, because I would say, probably the best part of that whole thing was doing a short stint in Switzerland.

I worked there for Frontiers for an internship, and I think doing something slightly different in any industry just makes you stand out a bit in your CV. It shows that you're quite passionate about taking this career, if you're willing to do something that maybe a lot of people around you in the industry wouldn't do. That was kind of like the changing point for me where I thought, 'Okay, I'm invested in this enough to move to another country for a while'.

**Caitlin Owen: Yeah, that's an interesting perspective I haven't really thought of before. What inspired you to get into your current field?**

**Priti Nagda:** In some ways, I took biomed as a degree because I didn't want to specialise in any one field, because I like so many different disciplines. In medical communications, if people want to go down that route, or journal publishing, which I did, it gives you a lot of choice. You can work on so many different journals and therapy areas. I felt like I was never limiting what I'd learned in my degree, and a lot of it applies directly to my current role and allows me to have really good conversations with authors and people in the field. Working in the labs as well has also given me the skills to talk technically about the concepts people are working on, which is really handy when you're going to conferences and things for networking -- it allows you to talk to people about their fields of passion. It's a unique advantage of this job.

**Caitlin Owen: Is there anything else that you particularly love about your job?**

**Priti Nagda:** I think the travel opportunities I've had throughout my career have been really good. Especially at Taylor and Francis, I was travelling sometimes up to five times a year. You get to see so many different places, you get to network, and meet people that you never would have met otherwise. It ties in with my travelling interests and my skills and hobbies. It's been really lovely.

I think the other big perk of the role is just that there's always chances to work on something that you're really interested in. You just have to put your foot forward and ask, really.

**Caitlin Owen: What sort of places have you been to on your travelling adventures?**

**Priti Nagda:** I used to get sent to North America and Europe a lot. Barcelona, Poland, most of the East Coast of America... Austin, Baltimore... a mixed bag really, whatever comes a long, it's a really good opportunity.

**Caitlin Owen: Is there anything that you would change?**

**Priti Nagda:** I think, I wish I'd known about this career pathway earlier. I guess that's a bit of a weird answer to that question. I think it's not something that's really spoken about in universities, which is a bit of a shame, because I had to go away and do my own research after university. When you do something like biomed, you just kind of think you have to go into the lab afterwards and that's kind of your career, when there's so much more out there than just that.

What I would change in my day-to-day role – well, living in a pandemic, travel is obviously out of the window, which I completely understand -- but sometimes you do feel in a job like this, that there's not enough hours in the day, I think. Sometimes there's so much to do, so many different roles, so many different projects to get involved in, you have to manage your time really well and cut back on your expectations of what you can achieve compared to what you really can achieve. So, more hours in the day would have been great.

**Caitlin Owen:** **That could be a bit of a learning curve for some people. Do you think what you have said about wishing that you knew earlier about this career is partly what inspired you to do this interview?**

**Priti Nagda:** Yeah, I think so, it's about letting people know that there's other options out there. I think with a science background, people automatically do picture people in a white lab coat. Pipettes, Eppendorfs and the white lab coat. But there's so many other options that exist out there and I think people should make use of career fairs more if your university holds those.

Also, I wish I got on LinkedIn a lot earlier. I underutilised that source when it was around years ago. Now there's people working in so many industries and disciplines that you can just drop a direct message to and just ask, quite frankly, 'What do you do? I'm looking to get into this industry.' I would really advocate for people just approaching other people and saying, 'Give me the real lowdown on what you do day-to-day.' I wish I had more tools like that at my disposal all those years ago, because it stops you feeling quite lost and confused about your career path and what you want to do.

**Caitlin Owen:** **Looking at people's profiles is a good way to see how they got to where they are now.**

**Priti Nagda:** Yeah, you can just... stalk... in a good way!

**Caitlin Owen:** **What do you think that students might not know about working in journal publishing, if not just all of it?**

**Priti Nagda:** Yeah, of course, even when I was researching into journal publishing or med comms and things, you know, it's really easy to have your confidence knocked a bit, or to think I could never do that, because you'll see roles where the prerequisite is normally a PhD, or quite high further education. But actually, although a vast majority of medical writers will have a PhD, there are some that don't, and in the same way, being a journal editor, you don't have to have a PhD -- I've managed journals for the last seven, eight years, and I have not got a PhD, I've not even gotten masters -- but I would say, it's one of those industries where experience really counts. If you're really good at your job, and you can carry on proactively learning for yourself, and take the opportunities as they come up. Having hands-on experience, is always going to be worth a lot at the end of the day, obviously, qualifications are great, but you've got to be able to show that you can achieve results as well.

One of the biggest tips I would give is, if I was interested in something, and I could see that someone was a step ahead of me in my career path, I would always go and shadow that person, or I would shadow that department, so that when an opportunity did come up for an interview, you can say that I've already had a go at working in that person's role, or this person shoes, even if it's a short as three or four weeks, it shows the person interviewing you that you're really serious about the next stage up. It's also a good reality check for yourself, like, can I actually do what this person is doing on the next level up? It also gives you a healthy kind of dose of reality, like, is that the step I want to take? So, I would say shadow, shadow, shadow, as many people as possible, and maybe now and again, just kind of check in with yourself and ask if you know what the next step of your career is.

**Caitlin Owen: That's really good advice. What sort of qualifications skills and experience are required in order to become an editor or senior editor in your field?**

**Priti Nagda:** It depends what journal publishing house you're in. For some journals, you really will need a PhD, especially if you're going to be editing manuscripts day-in, day-out, and you really need to be well-versed with the material handling. But if you're working on journals like we do in-house at Taylor and Francis, we work with editor-in-chiefs and a good editorial board, so you're kind of more assisting with the submission process and making sure that goes smoothly.

Of course, it always helps to have a good idea of the content you're looking at -- I was quite lucky: because I come from a clinical pharma background, they gave me clinical pharma titles. A lot of the times they will try and match you to your area of expertise, but then I would say, you can always do things outside of your job. If you want to go and get a proofreading qualification, or an editing qualification, you can do that in your own time, outside of your role. Sometimes your job or department would be happy to pay for that partly, if they know it's going to help the business.

But I would say continuous development and learning is something that you should just keep doing for yourself – I wouldn't wait for your workplace to tell you that it needs to be done. There are some short courses that I've taken on my own time that the FDA offered – there's lots of free learning resources and courses, even with LinkedIn learning.

You might not always have the qualifications you need to fulfil every single role within a company, but there's nothing stopping you doing that in your own time once you know exactly what you need.

**Caitlin Owen: I think evidencing in that is probably quite good for employers to see, which is where things like LinkedIn come back into the conversation as being useful. You've already given so much good advice. Is there anything left that you'd like to say to someone who is interested in this sort of career?**

**Priti Nagda:** Yeah, definitely. Internships are so worth their while. Anytime you can do something in a gap of time where you think you're not really sure what you want to do with the rest of your life, which is fine, or your career – say between the second or third year of uni, or even between your first and second year of uni – use your summer holidays wisely. You can always apply to do a short internship somewhere, at an agency. Once you've built up bonds with the same company or agency over a number of years, they're more likely to offer you a place later on if you've shown willing, and that you're interested.

I did a year in industry in a lab, and I took those opportunities when they came, even to relocate somewhere else for an internship. Although you think you may be adding on years to a degree or even taking a longer route to ending up where you really want to be, I think sometimes it's worth taking those chances. I would say, when you're younger, experience counts over money. I would build a bank of experience, and then you're going to end up in a better position further down the line.

**Caitlin Owen: I think that's quite pertinent for a lot of students really, I mean, we have the option to go on a sandwich year on our degree, and I think some students who shy away from it, because they don't want to delay getting into a paid role. From the sounds of what you're saying, you'd agree that it is better to go and get that experience.**

**Priti Nagda:** It worked for me. I graduated in 2009, the year the recession hit. But because I'd done a job in industry, I had a job waiting for me. Did I elongate my degree by a year? Yes, I did. But then did I save myself? Finding a job? Yes, I did as well.

**Caitlin Owen: Last of all -- I'm actually adding on a question -- what would a typical day look like for you, now at home, in this role?**

**Priti Nagda:** I wake up and get semi-ready, like I'm sure most people are at home -- I am taking full advantage of the fact that you can sort of lounge around a bit more. That's the other good thing about

working here: we're offered flexitime. I can start any time up until 11, so my typical day doesn't have a definite starting point. I'd have my morning to check my emails and set up or check my meetings for the day, then getting back to anything that needs my immediate, urgent attention. That could be liaising with colleagues in other departments, making sure that if someone's contacted me externally, especially someone from med comms or pharma, that they're happy with the service they're getting.

For a portion of the day, I might work internally on a special project. This could be a themed issue that I might be helping put together, or working on new digital offerings for the company. Then, just making sure that I'm moving on to another kind of work stream. A lot of this job is working on a lot of different streams agilely: knowing when to stop working on something and start or continue something else.

The afternoon is when I get a lot of emails, and I speak to a lot of people, because I deal with a lot of authors based in the US. So, when they wake up, my afternoons are very busy. Towards the end of the day, I would do a bit more sort of email work and just making sure that I'm tying up loose ends that may have sort of popped up during the day.

**Caitlin Owen: Do you have anything left that you would like students to know?**

**Priti Nagda:** I would say, when I was younger, I was a lot more shy about approaching people within the company. But if you feel like the company you're working in is right, but the department you're in might not be suited to you, just be a bit brave and let someone know that you'd like to maybe make a lateral change or a change in a different direction, even for a little while.

I think it's good to build your network within your company as much as possible, and externally as well. I didn't understand or realise the power of networking until just in the last sort of, five, four or five years. I wish I had networked a lot earlier, sort of from university, if I'd grown my network... you can do so many things. I'm really realising that more recently, even for myself, so if you're fresh out of uni, network, network, network. It's underrated.

**Caitlin Owen: Are there any sort of skills that you would recommend that people try and pick up to have better networking?**

**Priti Nagda:** Yeah, I would say do things that open up your reach, whether that's attending webinars virtually and really making use have the Q&A segment, sort of being brave and asking those questions, or following up with people afterwards, as well, and keeping in touch over email, checking in with people every now and again. If you notice that someone has moved to a new company, and you really still want to, follow their career and progress in their path, dropping in with them every few, six months or twelve months and saying, 'What do you do now? What are you up to now? Are there any possibilities? If they come your way you could you let me know?' And people are more than happy to help.

**Caitlin Owen: Thank you so much for your time, it's been a really great interview, I think it will be so useful for the students reading because there is definitely an issue with, as you say, thinking that you do this degree, so then you work in a lab or something very similar. Whilst plenty people wouldn't mind that, I think there are a lot of students who are more interested in what other opportunities are out there that maybe they haven't considered yet.**

**Priti Nagda:** I had one last piece of advice. Especially if you're going to med comms, I think. This is something I saw students starting to do when I was at uni, but I think people will do it naturally more, now. I think if you really liked writing, you've got a passion for writing, I think having a science blog or even vlog, or something like that as a part-time project, means you can showcase your portfolio of work in an interview, which means you've got a better chance of entering that field. Especially being able to translate science communication into accessible language for a broader audience. It's really important.

**Caitlin Owen: I'm really glad you said that, because that's, in part, exactly what we're trying to with this magazine.**

**Priti Nagda:** It 100% works and it's clear evidence that it's been a vested interest of yours for some time, and your passion comes across because you've created your own project. Also, you're working by your own initiative as well, and I think having initiative and doing things without someone telling you what to do is really important in any industry.

**Caitlin Owen:** So, for any students reading this interview, if this career is something that catches their eye, you would definitely say get involved with the magazine?

**Priti Nagda:** Oh, 100%.

**Caitlin Owen:** You heard it from Priti. Thank you, Priti.